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ABSTRACT

The study examined the ways in which status cultures and organizational environments influence high school students' college decision-making. Interviews were conducted with 12 white female high school seniors from four northern California high schools (a low socio-economic status(SES)/low organization public school, a low-SES/high organization Catholic school; a high-SES/low organization public school; and a high-SES/high organization private preparatory school) as well as with their best friends, parents, and counselors. The study analyzed the four schools' total resources devoted to college preparation; the structure, goals, and objectives underpinning the college guidance program; and the assumed knowledge of students participating in college planning. Findings revealed that the pressure on college-bound students is more pronounced at suburban public high schools and the private college preparatory school than others, and that school context played a significant role in shaping students' college choice. Most students applied to colleges that matched some aspect of their current habitus: colleges with the same supportive environment as their high school, or colleges consistent with their own personal values or personalities. (27 references) (LPT)

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Who Goes Where to College:
Social Class and Organizational Context Effects

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Who goes where to college? This project examines the ways in which status cultures and organizational environments independently and in interaction shape a high school student's perception of his or her opportunity structure for a college education. This research is undertaken in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a time in the college admissions world of rapid change. Students are caught in a strange admissions market where competition has intensified even though, because of declining enrollments, it should be a buyer's market. Although it is easier to get into college now than it was 20 years ago, it is harder to get into the "right" college (Winerup, 1984).

This research project asks: How does a high school senior in today's college admissions environment make decisions about <u>where</u> to go to college? How does that decision-making process vary by social class of student and high school context for college preparation? And ultimately: Why does the opportunity structure of higher education not work the same for everyone?

This is a report on research in progress and offers a view of how students in the late 1980s early 1990s decide **where** to go to college. My research examines how family, friends, schools, and other influences separately and together shape a student's perception of their opportunity structure for a college education. As a higher education scholar, I am deeply concerned with: 1) access and attrition issues for minorities and low-income students in higher education institutions; 2) helping students become informed consumers of higher education, and 3) the rapidly

changing college admissions world.

Let me address the last issue first and take just a few minutes to fill in the background about the wider admissions environment that is influencing college-bound students. The prospect of choosing a college today is very different than at any point in history: it's a brave new world out there.

Applications are up in record numbers since 1979, especially at Ivy League and other prestigious schools. There are major differences in the application practices of students from different socioeconomic statuses: first-generation college-goers go for the obvious choices---the most competitive Ivies or less expensive state schools; while middle and upper income students apply everywhere (sometimes up to 22 applications), even though application fees are approximately $40-50 each.

College is now seen as a major personal investment needing extensive, careful planning for at least students from middle and upper income families. Their application process is increasingly pressurized and speeded up, seniors are preoccupied with choice, and some parents now start strategic planning for college in elementary or preschool. At the same time, the number of guidance counselors in the public schools have grown alarmingly small. Because of economic hardship, schools have divested themselves of guidance operations. In the face of this gap, private consultants and families have taken up the advisement slack where the family has the knowledge and resources to do so.

For those in the know, there are a myriad of media influenc-

ing college-bound students computer software, radio-tv-newspaper advertising, statewide clearinghouses on college placement which send materials on college planning to middle school students and high school freshmen, as well as slick magazines directed at high school juniors paid for by colleges featuring articles on the value of private education. These magazines are color-coded by SAT scores with different editions distributed to different income neighborhoods.

Then there is the growing phenomenon of a new breed of image consultant--the private college counselor--charging on average $1000 for helping students to define choices and get into the college of their choice. In this research, one father summed up why his family employed the services of a private college counselor to make college choices and to help them package their applicant daughter:

> a very simple reason...we have no confidence in the school to provide that service. It's as simple as that. We felt that we have somewhat of a problem here with Sara because of her SAT and achievement tests results and...we wanted to make sure that she gets to the right schools...it's not cheap, I can tell you right now. But at the same time I could also tell you that we never thought twice about it, because when it comes to education...money is the last consideration.

Students decide where to go to college by many methods. In pilot research for this project, an upper middle class white youth felt that since his family had attended Harvard for the last several generations, he was "almost genetically programmed" to attend the family alma mater; while a poor, Black woman offered the names of two local community colleges she was

considering attending and was clear that these were the only colleges she knew of and that she had learned of their existence from the signs on the highway near her house.

It is important to remember though that college attendance is a complex process involving individual aspiration and institutional admissions, approximately 59% of high school seniors (or about 1.6 million students) find places annually in over 3,000 colleges in the highly stratified U.S. system of postsecondary education (Snyder, 1987). This figure suggests an opportunity structure that is fair, open, and meritocratic. However, in fact, our society's opportunity structure does not work equally well for all. The aggregate college enrollment rate masks vast discrepancies in the access and retention rates of many minority and economically disadvantaged students.

Across all achievement levels, the lowest SES students are less likely to have applied to or attended college than their highest SES counterparts with similar academic records. Among the highest achieving students, 60% of the lowest SES students attended college, while 86% of the highest SES students did (Gardner, 1987). Minority and poor students are less likely to start or finish college and more likely to attend low prestige institutions or colleges with the highest dropout rates (Hearn, 1988b).

Researchers and policy experts are alarmed at the increased stratification within higher education sectors. There are salient distinctions between 2 and 4 year colleges, selective and

non-selective universities, and private and public institutions which are important sources of inequality in adult life: where one attends college influences one's eventual educational attainment (Alba and Lavin, 1981; Karabel and Astin, 1975; and Sewell, 1971; Velez, 1985).

Research also shows that the college one attends drastically affects one's chances of completing the baccalaureate; as persistence rates vary widely across institutions, even after ability is controlled (Velez, 1985). Elite institutions have persistence rates of between 85 and 95%. Four year public institutions have much lower rates-- approximately 45% (Snyder, 1987).

Community colleges are more complicated since they have dual missions of terminal degree preparation as well as transfer to four year institutions. However, community colleges which enroll more than half of first-time freshmen, have transfer rates of less than 10% (Cohen and Brawer, 1982; Hirschorn, 1988). Actual baccalaureate degree completion rates are even lower (Karabel and Brint, 1990).

In spite of all this research on institutional effects, observed college attendance patterns are more an issue of <u>self</u>-selection than college admissions decisions. Ninety percent of 1980 seniors included in the High School and Beyond longitudinal sample were admitted to their first choice institution (Karen, 1988). Most students use their SAT scores as a screening device to choose colleges where they are likely to be accepted, and

where other students' SATs are not significantly different from their own (Manski and Wise, 1983).

Effects of Ability, Background Characteristics and Aspirations

For all students, academic achievement remains the most important determinant of whether and where one goes to college (Karen, 1988; Thomas, 1979; Alexander and Eckland 1979). However, systematic relationships exist within achievement groupings between income and college selectivity. Independent of academic factors, upper income youth were especially likely in 1980-81 to enter America's elite colleges (Hearn, 1987 and 1988a). Blacks, women, and low-SES students were especially likely to attend lower-selectivity institutions, even if their ability and achievements were high (Hearn, 1984 and 1988a).

Students' educational expectations play a major role in college placement (Hearn, 1987) and oftentimes are the single strongest predictor of four year college attendance (Thomas, 1980). Longstanding college goals can be resources: intending to go to college increases the likelihood of going by 21% when that intention develops prior to 10th grade, compared to plans formulated in senior year (Alexander and Cook, 1979). Hearn contends that students' and parents' perceptions, attitudes, and knowledgeability about college attendance may take on distinctive shapes for different social classes and races as early as the 10th grade of high school and thus may produce differences in families' college planning (1984), for example they tend to take different courses.

However, students' educational plans are unstable predictors of actual behavior. There are major differences in the application practices of students from different socioeconomic statuses: first-generation college-goers go for the obvious choices--the most competitive Ivies or less expensive state schools--while middle and upper income students apply everywhere (up to 22 applications), even though application fees are approximately $35 each (Winerup, 1984).

Although college enrollment is obviously a complicated issue, multivariate research has produced a tentative hierarchy of effects of background characteristics on educational attainment. In the hierarchy of background characteristics' effects on college destination, gender seems to be significant but the least influential. The sorting of women into college destinations is much more strongly affected by status origins than it is for men (Alexander and Eckland, 1977).

Holding achievement constant, race effects were more influential than sex in affecting the process of college entry (Thomas 1979). Asian Americans have a strong orientation to selective colleges and are twice as likely to apply to the best schools than white students (Karen, 1988). One researcher contends that blacks and Hispanics, as a group, aren't as likely to try to get into a highly selective college because of their lower grades, test scores, and level of participation in extracurricular activities (Karen, 1988).

The most stubborn barriers to full equity in entrance to

college remain in social class background rather than race, ethnicity or gender (Hearn, 1988). Social class exerts twice as much effect on selectivity as race/ethnicity or gender (Karen, 1988). The substantial impact that class status exerts operates directly through individual choice and indirectly through scholastic aptitude's impact on available options (Karen, 1988).

In previous research (McDonough, 1988) I found a number of differences between first-generation college-bound high school students and students whose parents have completed college: when they first began to think about college; what triggered those college thoughts; how they prepared for college; what they knew about different types of colleges and universities; what their families and friends thought about college; how they related to their parents in regard to college planning; what they knew about standardized tests and particular colleges; what the stresses of college planning were; and the conflicts faced by students who are differentiating themselves from their friends, families, and communities. The challenge for further research in college destinations for all students is in untangling the web of causation (Hearn, 1987).

School Context

The high school environment has strong effects on how students choose colleges. Public and private schools appear to differ in important ways regarding college enrollment decisions and culture. Seniors enrolled in private high schools are significantly more likely to enter college and to enroll in four

year institutions, even when track, ability levels, aspirations and SES are controlled (Falsey & Heyns, 1984).

About half of the difference in the higher college attendance rates of private school students can be accounted for by socioeconomic status for non-Catholic, private school students and, by differences in orientations and expectations of parents toward college attendance in Catholic school students (Coleman, 1987). The balance of college attendance differences is attributed to the organization of structure and content of curriculum and extracurricular activities; higher academic standards and the value climate; formal and informal communication networks; orientation of school staff; and resources devoted to counseling and advising of college-bound students (Falsey and Heyns, 1984; Alexander and Eckland, 1977).

On average, private schools are smaller, have different rules and expectations, and have larger percentages of students in the academic track. Private schools are helping students to realize their college aspirations better than public schools through a greater proportion of counselors per student who encourage and influence a large proportion of their students in their college planning. (Falsey and Heyns, 1984).

Research on guidance and counseling indicates that a school, public or private, can affect college application through an ethos built on supportive, knowledgeable staff who affect students even without direct exposure to specific programs (Hotchkiss & Vetter, 1987). This disparity of organizational

mission and resources between public and private schools necessarily has an impact on students' planning for college.

For twenty years, large-scale quantitative studies have dominated the educational attainment field, repeatedly demonstrating that mother's and father's educational attainment, proxy effects like number of books in the home, and related variables affect a student's attainment. However, this research has been labelled atheoretical because it has not adequately explained how or why these factors are influential (Knottnerus, 1987).

Educational sociologists now are studying how different populations' everyday experiences in and out of school foster recurrent patterns of educational attendance. This research asks how an individual's ascribed and achieved statuses influence their attainment. Researchers have shifted their attention to the growing realization that where a person attends college is critically important in understanding the links between social class and educational attainment, persistence, and occupational achievement (Karabel and Useem, 1986). Class differentials in access to particular kinds of institutions are an important aspect of how the educational system contributes to the intergenerational transmission of status, since high status students are both more likely to attend college and more likely to attend a good college than low status students (Karabel and Astin, 1975).

An important issue for this study, then is to understand the relative and interactive impacts of a student's social class

background and the high school's social and organizational contexts on a senior's college choice process? My research examines how and why students make the choices they do about college. I am generating a theoretical argument to explain how and why socioeconomic status so strongly influences educational entrance. Specifically I am asking three basic questions:

> Why does the opportunity structure of higher education not work the same for everyone?
>
> How does a high school senior in today's college admissions environment make decisions about <u>where</u> to go to college?
>
> How does the college-choice decisionmaking process vary by social class of student (and by status context of school) and by the structure and context for guidance across different types of schools?

Status and Organizational Context Effects

Why does the higher education opportunity structure work differently for different students? This study builds on Weberian theories of status groups and intergenerational status transmission as well as organizational theories of decision-making to highlight the salience of diversity of organizational context and status culture background on individual decisionmaking.

I am using macro organizational theory to look at the interactions between the high school and the college admissions environment, while using micro organizational theory to study behavioral rationality within organizations. Organizational theories help us to understand how and why a school context can influence individual behavior, while status group theories help

us understand the differences in attainment rates of various socioeconomic status groups.

The conceptual framework has three elements: other things held constant, 1) a student's **cultural capital** affects how much and what quality of college education that student intends to acquire; 2) a student's choice of college makes sense in the context of that student's friends, family, and outlook, or **habitus**; and 3) through a process of **bounded rationality**, students limit the number of alternatives actually considered. These concepts provide a means of examining the influences of family, friends, and the high school teaching and guidance structure in determining what are the environmental triggers that help to frame each student's view of their own opportunity structure.

The **cultural capital** theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu (1977) has been important in many of the new studies that focus on how and why class status plays a role in educational achievement. For this research I am situating high school students' college choice processes in their social, cultural, and organizational contexts and am demonstrating the essential role of values, as they are embedded in everyday life, in decisions about **where** to go to college.

Status groups are social collectivities that generate or appropriate distinctive cultural traits and styles as a means to monopolize scarce social and economic resources for themselves (Weber, 1978). Elite status groups have appropriated educational

credentials for the intergenerational transmission of social status and power (Bourdieu, 1977; Bernstein, 1977). Cultural capital is a symbolic good which is most useful when it is converted into economic capital. Although all classes have their own forms of cultural capital, the most socially and economically valued forms are those possessed by the middle and upper classes.

Cultural capital is that property that middle and upper class families transmit to their offspring which substitutes for or supplements the transmission of economic capital as a means of maintaining class status and privilege across generations (Bourdieu, 1977). Cultural capital is precisely the knowledge which elites value yet schools do not teach, including the ability to decode or decipher the means of appropriating symbolic goods. In this study, a college education is a status resource or symbolic good in our society.

Bourdieu observes that those high in cultural capital have clear strategies of how much and what kind of schooling each generation should have. A student's disposition toward school is important because to maximize or conserve cultural capital you must be willing to consent to the investments in time, effort, and money that higher education requires. Parents transmit cultural capital by informing offspring of the value and the process for securing a college education, and its potential for conversion in the occupational attainment contest.

DiMaggio (1982) suggests that cultural capital mediates the relationship between family background and school outcomes and

suggests that cultural capital's impact on educational attainment may be most important on quality of college attended. He suggests that cultural capital possibly may play different roles in the mobility strategies of different classes and genders.

Bourdieu also has developed a concept of **habitus** as a deeply internalized, permanent system of outlooks, experiences, and beliefs about the social world that an individual gets from his or her immediate environment. According to Bourdieu, habitus is a common set of subjective perceptions held by all members of the same group or class that shapes an individual's expectations, attitudes, and aspirations. Those aspirations are both subjective assessments of the chances for mobility and objective probabilities. They are not rational analyses, but rather are the ways that when looking at people who surround them, children from different classes make "sensible" or "reasonable" choices for their own aspirations. This research is an elaboration of Bourdieu's work proposing the concept of "entitlement:" students believe that they are entitled to a particular kind of collegiate education based on their family's habitus or class status.

Students face a complex decision when choosing a college. According to March and Simon (1958), individuals perceive their choices by scanning, which often is limited by geography and their usual social contacts. The high school senior's frame of reference and perceptions are conditioned by the evoking mechanism--the high school context for college choice. This research will demonstrate how the organizational context can differential-

ly impact students from different class backgrounds. In addition to looking at the ways an organization evokes responses from seniors headed to college, bounded rationality and organizational decoupling will frame the analyses of school habitus.

Bounded rationality refers to behavior that is intendedly rational but necessarily limited. Because of the cognitive limits on decisionmaking, high school seniors can not and do not consider all of the 3000 possible collegiate choices (Simon, 1957). Most people settle for satisfactory alternatives due to time and resource limitations. However, which alternatives are considered are influenced by the individual's physical location, social networks, and environmental stimuli, as well as the goals and consequences for college that will be anticipated.

An elaboration of the college-choice process must account for both the cognitive and affective processes underlying the premises for decisionmaking (March & Simon, 1958). Individual student behavior will be influenced by the flow and content of information and explicit expectations that highlight or downplay specific options (Perrow, 1979) and are based on assumptions about how familiar students are with basic information, prerequisites, and specialized college choice vocabularies.

The high school is an intermediate institution in the educational system. Student continuation to college is a voluntary process, and the transition, in contrast to the elementary-secondary link, is driven by individual ability, motivation, agency, and behavior. High schools and colleges are,

at best, loosely coupled (Weick, 1976) and at worst, decoupled. Although high schools help individuals manage and overcome loose coupling, colleges are fairly autonomous and have individualized rules and procedures for admittance despite some similarities of procedures and generalized norms.

III. Methodology

I interviewed 12 white, female, high school seniors in the 1988-89 academic year, from four Northern California high schools. The girls all were middle-range academic performers in their schools and had GPAs that ranged from 2.8-3.4. Because I wanted to understand and describe the nexus of friends, family, and school contexts, I also interviewed those students' best friends (12), parents (12), and counselors(4).

Two high schools had students drawn from predominantly high-SES families, while the other two had students drawn from predominantly low-SES families. Within each school I selected two students who matched the school SES and one who didn't to see if they accessed the school's resources differently. The schools also were selected for their variation on their college guidance program and counselor to student ratio. These schools included 2 public schools, a private prep school, and a Catholic school. I have analyzed observational data, school documents, and surveys of a large sample of the senior classes from each school.

These schools fit the dichotomy with which I have framed this research: high and low on a guidance operation dimension, and high and low on a socioeconomic status. This results in four

types of schools: a low-SES/low-organization school (public-Mission Cerrito), a low-SES/high-organization (Catholic, Gate of Heaven) school, a high-SES/low-organization school (public-University), and a high-SES/high-organization (private preparatory-Paloma) school.

Table 1

	Low Guidance	High Guidance
Low SES	Mission Cerrito	Gate of Heaven
High SES	University	Paloma

Findings

My cross-case analysis of the four schools in this study is not an assessment of an individual counselor's or school's college guidance program effectiveness, rather it is an assessment of the broader school climate's impact on creating a set of expectations that delimit the universe of possible college choices into a smaller range of manageable considerations. I have documented each school's total resources devoted to college preparation, how that effort is structured, the goals and objectives underpinning the college guidance program, and the knowledge assumed of students participating in college planning. A school's context shapes the quality of everyday school experiences and offers insight into how particular student outcomes are enabled or constrained (Oakes, 1989). I believe that school leaders and counselors construct an organizational environment in response to perceptions of parental and community expectations of appropriate college destinations for their children. I am viewing each school as the mediator of the collective social

class consciousness of the community that it serves.

Table 2 offers some basic information about the four schools in this study and how they have constructed a college guidance program to assist college-bound seniors. The counselor:student ratio in the private prep school is comparable to what Cookson and Persell have found (1985), while the Catholic school average here is lower than Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore (1982) has found 1:235. The nationwide average for public schools is 1:323, yet

Table 2
Organizational Comparisons

	Paloma	Gate of H.	University	Mission
Students	210	450	1280	1800
Seniors	56	117	365	400
Counselors	1	1	2	1
% of Effort to College Guid.	100	90	90	50

in California the statewide estimate is one counselor per 848 students. What follows is a description of the counseling program at each of these schools.

College counseling functions are the centerpiece of Paloma's raison d'etre: college preparation. Preparing for college is something that pervades the very essence of being at Paloma and, as such, is evident to one degree or another in almost every interaction. Mrs. Ball is the college counselor and all of her efforts as well as all course content at Paloma has been developed to assist in college preparation. Mrs. Ball spends a lot of time with every student advising and developing specific plans that include a dream school, but more importantly a small number of reasonable choices of colleges. Mrs. Ball is acutely aware of

today's college admission environment and attempts to help students manage both their admissions and rejections. Based on assumptions of students' familarity with types and ranges of colleges and intentions to pursue college, Paloma does not begin explicit counseling for specific college choices until midway through the junior year. However, Paloma does not leave a student's curricular preparation to chance; all courses are tailored to offer students maximum college choices without narrowing the range unnecessarily.

Gate of Heaven has developed a detailed four-year effort at preparing students, who are assumed to know very little about college types or requirements. Ms. Trent provides increasingly more complex information on options to students from 9th through 12th grades. Gate of Heaven's college counseling efforts include individualized counseling, group discussions, and teacher involvement, while providing books and technology for additional support. The college counseling program assumes that students need basic education about college planning, accompanied by nurturance and support. College guidance at Gate of Heaven begins immediately in the ninth grade and continues on throughout a students' career at Gate of Heaven.

University High School faces a reality of numbers: the college counselor can not effectively assist every college-bound student. Consequently counseling efforts are focused on helping students set up a four-year curricular plan that will set the enabling conditions for them to meet college prerequisities.

Then the college counseling efforts are directed at group informational meetings on how to comply generically with college admissions norms. Matt Dix primarily helps students with the University of California and California State University systems' processes but does not try to assist students with the quagmire of specific "climate" or "feel" of individual campuses, state or private. University High School's college counseling efforts have historically been affected by parental or student demand. The most notable example of this was establishing a college advising center and hiring a private college counselor to staff that office. (However, she only works with a select few students.) University High School's counselors assume a fixed hierarchy of college opportunities and help students find their place in it based on seemingly immutable GPA and SAT numbers. Unlike at Paloma, there is no assumption that students may be able to manipulate those numbers or that many private colleges might offer better opportunities. Students complain of feeling tracked into either UC or CSU choices. Students at University High School bear the onus of responsibility for college-choice decisionmaking: Matt Dix is unable to provide time for intensive individual counseling or helping students cope with the emotional aspects of the admissions process.

Mission Cerrito begins its college counseling program latest: students are not seen or even addressed in groups about college options until their senior year. The counselor, Joe Sirotti, is non-interventionist in student's college decisionmak-

ing: his competing organizational responsibilities effectively preclude his seeing students individually and he has little or no time to keep up on specific entrance requirements or even information about different curricula available. In spite of his hands-off approach, he advocates attending one of the three local community colleges immediately after graduation from Mission Cerrito. The MCHS college college guidance program is very reactive, offering minimal information on even UC and CSU schools. Mission Cerrito has little to offer students in the way of college guidebooks or publically available software. MCHS's commitment to college preparation is minimal outside of the counseling office, although some teachers write letters of recommendation or may answer occasional student questions.

What do these very different high school contexts enable or constrain? The first indicator is the patterns of college destinations for students from each of these schools.

Table 3
College Continuation Rates[1]

	Paloma	Gate of H.	University	Mission
% to college	98%	91%	89%	70%
-2 year	2%	32%	18%	55%
-4 year	96%	59%	71%	15%
-private	55%	15%	31%	NA
-UC	36%	11%	39%	NA
-CSU	0%	33%	11%	NA

In terms of baseline college continuation, Paloma sends

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[1]All data come from counselor reports and are based on the class of 1987-88, the graduates from the year prior to our subjects.

almost all of its students to college, Gate of Heaven and University High School send approximately nine out of every ten students, while a little over half of Mission Cerrito's students go directly on to college. However, the aggregate data do not tell the whole story. The kinds of colleges that these students attend vary quite a bit.

Almost all Paloma students are going to either a UC or a private four year school, while only a little over half of Gate of Heaven girls are going to four year schools. The rest of Gate of Heaven students, 32%, are going to community colleges. The 59% of the Gate of Heaven students who are going to four year collegesare distributed into 33% to CSU schools, 15% to private schools, and only 11% to UC schools.

Meanwhile, University HS students resemble their high-SES Paloma counterparts in that two-thirds are going on to four year schools, however, they are more evenly distributed between UCs and private colleges, with 11% going to CSU campuses. Mission Cerrito students follow totally different college pathways with the majority of students going to community colleges. Of those students going to four year schools, I could get no information because Mr. Sirotti claimed that he doesn't have the time and there is no demand for this information.

College admissions environments also shape the structure and culture of high school guidance. Paloma and University High Schools are shaped by a national, volatile, competitive college admissions environment, while Mission Cerrito and Gate of

Heaven's organizational habiti are shaped by local opportunity structures. Consistent with other research, I found that the pressure on college-bound high school students has been more pronounced at suburban public high schools and private college-prep schools. Furthermore, these high schools offer admissions' essay development assistance in senior English courses as well as SAT coaching classes.

Findings

This is just a brief summary of the ways that organizational context influences a student's college decisionmaking. Other sections of the larger research project focus on families, friends, cost considerations, high school jobs, private counselors, and more on the college admissions environments as influences on students.

What follows is a brief identification some emergent status culture and organizational environment patterns. Academic achievement is seen by working-class students as set and an inflexible fact of their admissions potential. For upper-middle class students, achievements thus far are seen as somewhat manipulable through SAT coaching classes the use of private counselors, and their presentation of self.

Students' feelings about their college years as a time for breaking away from family, neighborhood and friends combine with their perceptions of geographical constraints to delimit the area over which they cast their college choice net. All students seem constrained by the need to be able to get home quickly in an

emergency or as a fix to bouts of loneliness, although the family's economic resources allow rich and poor students to view those constraints differently.

Nothing brought this point home more poignantly than when I discovered that both the high and low SES students each talked about being no more than two hours away from home. However, the low SES students were talking about being two hours by car or bus while the high SES students were talking about being two hours away by car.

The values of community and loyalty held by the working class students are quite different from those of the upper-middle class students who view their community more as a geographically unbounded social class than a neighborhood. The high SES students go out of state far more frequently than their working class peers: 42% of Paloma and 26% of University students go out-of-state, while an estimated 2% of Gate of Heaven and 3 or 4% of Mission Cerrito students go out-of-state.

Cost considerations of college vary greatly for rich and poor students in when and how they come into play in the college choice process. Over and over again, when asked how influential financing college was in their decisionmaking, low-SES students talked about that as their burden, yet as something their parents would "help with" where possible. The high-SES students, almost to a person said that they were not thinking about it, that their parents would handle it.

Application patterns differ greatly for high- and low-SES

students. Gate of Heaven students filed between 1 and 7 applications, and the Mission Cerrito students filed between 2 and 4. Paloma students filed between 6 and 13 applications, while University High School students filed between 2 and 18. One University High School student, Sara, felt at odds with her peers for only applying to six schools

> It's the least number of anyone who I know....Very bizarre feeling....Because all these people are applying to so many schools because they don't know what they're going to get into, and then here me with six schools, and only two of them I'd really seriously consider, possibly a third."

The role of safeties--schools that students apply to and are sure they can get in--varies for different social class students. The economically-advantaged students are looking for good liberal arts schools and are desperate for "safeties," but only safeties that will have prestige and satisfy their status-conscious fellow students, parents, and neighbors. While most low-SES students do not discuss safeties they do apply to local community colleges because the are "safe bets."

Finally, most students also are looking for colleges that match some aspect of their current **habitus**: either colleges that have the same supportive environment that they have been nurtured in during high school, or colleges that are consistent with their own personal values or personalities.

At the school level I found:

1). For Paloma students, cost is not a big factor, geography is unlimited, and their current academic achievement is manipulable. The majority of these students use private coun-

selors in addition to their school counselor to improve their application strategies, essays, and presentation of self.

2). For University High School students, cost is a modest factor, geography is somewhat unlimited, and achievement is most often the same as first group of students. Private counselors are also used frequently.

3). For Gate of Heaven students, cost is a substantial factor, achievement is a modest limitation, and their geography is very narrow and local--they consider schools 25-50 miles away, but most often attend within 5-15 miles. For these Catholic school students and their parents, a private high school education was seen as a hedge against bad public high schools and public colleges are seen as cost-effective and more than adequate.

4.) For Mission Cerrito students cost, achievement, and geography are substantial factors. These students don't see their high school preparations as at all adequate and focus their college sights primarily on junior colleges. They rarely look beyond 10-15 miles. For Mission Cerrito students the community colleges nearby are some of the best in the state and a 2 year school is seen as a safe investment, a way to "try out" college, and to "sharpen their limited academic skills" in a safe, familiar environment. Even though 55% of Mission Cerrito college-bound students attend junior colleges, there is still a stigma attached to junior colleges that all students noted.

<u>Implications</u>

My research findings suggests that individuals' cultural capital becomes evident in a sense of "entitlement:" students believe they are entitled to a particular kind of collegiate education based on their family's habitus or class status, and that students organize their college searches around a range of "acceptable" institutions. Moreover, school context plays a significant role in shaping student tastes for particular types of postsecondary institutions and that habitus exists not only in families and communities but also in organizational contexts.

There are three levels of implications for this research: the first level is the social class and organizational context patterns I have just elaborated. Scholars of educational equity need to redirect their efforts to study **how and why** students make decisions about college. I hope that my research can be extended to males, other racial and ethnic categories, and the highest and lowest ability students. I believe there are three levels of implications for this research: the first level--the social class and organizational context effects are the patterns I have just elaborated. To bring about educational equity we need to know how students are making decisions about where to go to college, and I hope that the model I have elaborated can be tested for males, many other racial and ethnic categories, the highest and lowest ability students, and students from outside California. This should help us better understand and address pipeline issues.

A second level of implications concerns policymakers and

practitioners. We have begun and need to continue to address issues of ability and economic accessibilty. I am trying to document a need to recognize and affirmatively address the cultural barriers to full realization of higher education's opportunity structure. Better counselor student ratios might help college-bound students who lack family resources in finding the "right" college opportunities. High schools might review their college counseling programs to analyze the habitus they are fostering and make any changes they might deem necessary.

The third level of implications are for school climate research and organizational theory. I have proposed the elaboration of Bourdieu's concept of habitus to the organization. Habitus is reasonable or rational behavior in context. I have tried to show how organizational habitus makes possible individual decisions by bounding the search parameters for some students while reinforcing family and friends influences for other students.

I am suggesting that class-based patterns of organizational habitus span across individual schools, albeit with slight variations. Future research needs to examine a larger sample of schools so that findings related to habitus can be extended beyond the individual school level of analysis to identify schools with similar habiti and similar bases of family class backgrounds. School climate and organizational culture research has focused on individual organizations and has not explored the common social class norms that produce similar organizational

context effects and how that influences outcomes and reproduces social inequalities.

Another theoretical implication is that research on organizational habitus counteracts quantitative studies which see counselors as having little or no impact. Instead, I offer evidence that counselors can have tremendous impact, most especially in the cases of first-generation college-bound students. Their impact can either be in the one-on-one advising situation or more likely in the school climate for college counseling that the counselor creates. For example, one student at University High School who was from a low-SES family, found the counselor, the school's "Four Year Plan", and her peers assistance invaluable. In fact, when she began her college choice process, she didn't know about PSATs, when her best friend insisted that she visit the campuses before choosing she came to realize that some of the schools she was interested in were private colleges, and she aggressively sought help from the school's career center.

I am contributing to an emerging sociological tradition of integrating studies of status collectivities and organizations. Karabel conducted an historical study of 3 elite universities and their admissions processes as a case of organizational self-interest, David Karen has examined the organizational context of selective university admissions processes and demonstrated the ways in which meritocratic and class-based factors play a role in the selection decisionmaking process.

Finally, although I am offering conclusions and suggestions about the college choice decisionmaking process, this same framework could be applied to examining how individuals choose to go to proprietary schools, go directly into the workforce and which kinds of jobs, and could be linked to research on internal labor markets (ILMs) and job ladders: it may be productive to view high schools as providing entry points on particular educational opportunity ladders much the same way that ILMs set a person on a particular corporate track.

I have focused attention on the processes that individuals go through in choosing a college and have identified patterns of social class influences on the resources individuals have at their disposal to make college choices. I am suggesting a reconceptualization of the interinstitutional linkages between the secondary and postsecondary educational systems, and between families and schools.

As a final caveat, I am not ignoring the randomness that often accompanies anyone's, especially a 17 year old's, choices. However, the specific choices are not as important as the processes that students go through and the set of outcomes that are defined as acceptable. Hopefully, I have shed some light on how schools, families, and communities influence college bound seniors and shape their aspirations and their class-based senses of entitlement, and more importantly how this is an important issue of educational equity.

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